

The Playboy of the Netherworld

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I'll not be a fool like the nightingale
Who sits up till midnight without any ale,
Making noise with his nose.

At war within, he spared neither his country,
nor his
contemporaries, nor himself—poor dramatist
devoid of
dramatic gift! But he was too hard on his
own work.
It is difficult to read through. I have done so
twice, and
never shall again. But I return with ever
fresh astonish-
ment to his fragments. The unfinished
traceries, the
ruined aisles of this gaunt sham-Gothic
cathedral that he
left half-built and roofless to the scorn of
Time, will
outlast many a newer and more finished
edifice; saved by
the almost unearthly perfectness of here a
carved line,
there a sculptured monster; and by the
strange owl-light
of its atmosphere in which Death's Jester
wandered to his
early and disastrous end. There is often
more quint-
essential poetry, I feel, in three lines of his
than in as
many pages of other poets not without
repute. Only
wreckage remains of him; but enough to
sustain his
memory in that sea of Eternity into which
he heard
Time's river falling, himself so soon to fall.

NOTE. I should like to add that Mr. C H. Wilkinson
of Worcester
College, Oxford, to whose kindness I owe a
communication on the

subject, regards Gosse's story of Browning's horror
for the Beddoes
MSS. as an unconscious invention in Gosse's later
memories. Brown-
ing's letter to Gosse inviting him to come and see the
papers is extant,
and quite calm in tone. The question is a difficult one
and not im-
portant; it seems dear that Gosse exaggerated; but
that he completely
invented his story, even unconsciously or through
misunderstanding,
I find a little hard to believe.